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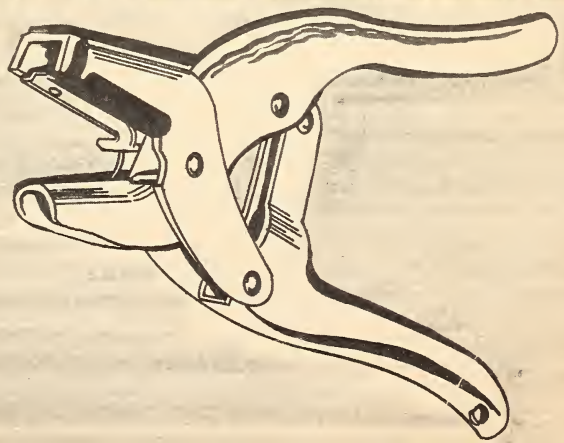
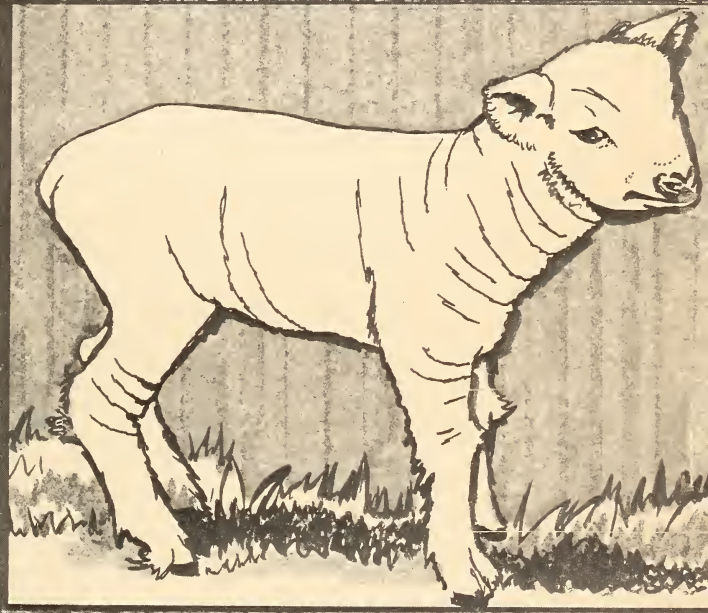
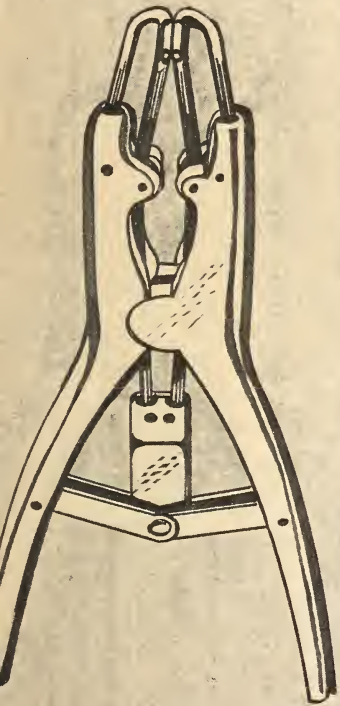
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Docking Castrating and Ear Tagging Lambs

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Docking, Castrating, and Ear Tagging Lambs

The largest part of the returns from farm sheep flocks comes from the sale of lambs. For this income to be as large as possible, your lambs must be in the best possible market condition.

Docked lambs generally bring a higher price than those with long tails, and wether (castrated) and ewe lambs generally bring a higher price than ram lambs.

Permanent identification of individual sheep and their progeny is essential for selection of the most productive breeding animals. Identification is also necessary to keep accurate records on lamb and wool production.

Docking

The chief reasons for docking are:

1. Docked lambs are much cleaner around the tail and are less susceptible to fly strike and maggot infestation.

2. Docking improves the general appearance of lambs and sheep.

3. Docked or short-tailed ewes are easier to breed and settle.

4. The dressed carcasses of docked lambs are more attractive in appearance.

5. Packers and lamb feeders pay higher prices for docked lambs.

Every lamb, male or female, should be docked before it is 14

days old. The tail is cut off 1 to 1½ inches from the body—near the ends of the caudal folds on the underside of the tail.

If possible, do the docking on a bright, warm day. Provide clean, freshly bedded quarters, and keep the lamb quiet both before and after the operation.

The elastrator - rubber band method may be used within 24 hours after the lamb's birth. As shown in figure 1, stretch the rubberband over the lamb's tail with the elastrator, and then slip it off the prongs. The tight band will cut off the blood circulation, and the tail will drop off in a few days.

Lambs 7 to 10 days old may be docked with a pocket knife. As



Figure 1.—Docking with the elastrator and rubberband.

N 39366



ST 2059-9

Figure 2.—Docking with a knife.

shown in figure 2, hold the lamb in a standing position between your legs with its head toward the rear. Then, holding the tail tautly with one hand, sever it with a quick upward stroke. Always cut from the underside of the tail to the top or woolly side. Use a moderately sharp knife; a very sharp one may cause excessive bleeding. Before cutting the tail, push the skin back toward the body to leave some excess skin to grow over the cut end.

Docking shears, available from livestock supply houses, may be used to cut off the tail instead of a knife.

Figure 3 shows docking with a heated chisel or docking iron. This

Tetanus Inoculation

It may be advisable to inoculate all docked and castrated lambs for tetanus. Check with your veterinarian on the necessity and the procedure.

method may be used on lambs 7 to 14 days old. The lamb's tail is inserted through a hole in a board $\frac{3}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick. The board prevents burning the lamb any place other than the tail, and its thickness regulates the length of dock. Heat the iron to a cherry-red heat—no hotter. If properly heated, the iron will sear the wound and minimize bleeding.

Hot docking pincers, available from most livestock supply houses, may be used in the above method instead of a heated chisel or iron.

The emasculator, or "Burdizzo," shown in figure 4, is sometimes used for docking. With very young lambs, the tail is clamped in the instrument and pulled off. With older lambs, it is severed with a knife just outside the jaws of the emasculator. The pressure applied with the emasculator squeezes the main artery and prevents bleeding, but this is a slow method of docking.



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Figure 3.—Docking with a heated chisel.

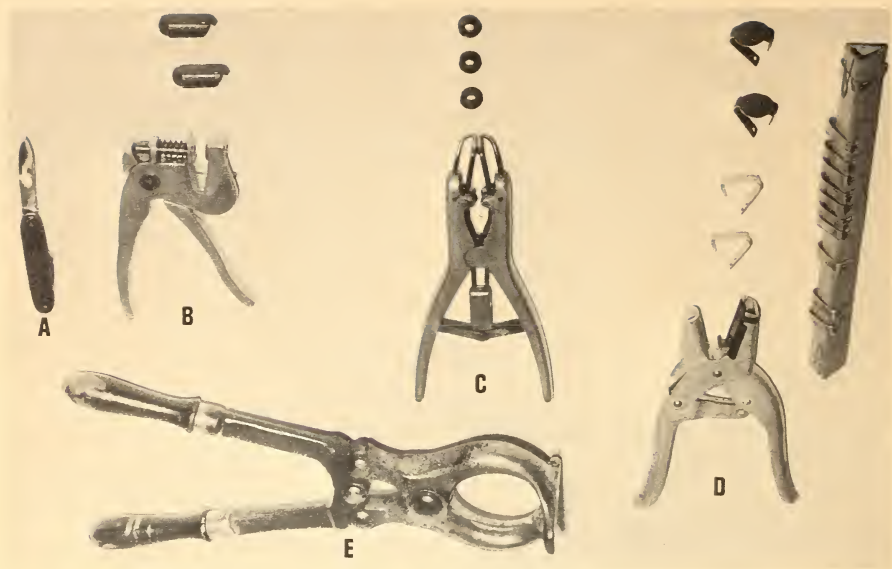


Figure 4.—Docking, castrating, and ear tagging equipment: A, Knife; B, plastic ear tags and applicator; C, elastrator and band; D, metal tags and applicator; E, emasculator (Burdizzo). N 39369

Profuse bleeding may occur when the tail is cut off. To stop the bleeding, tie a string tightly around the tail stub. Mark the lamb (a chalk mark will do) so that you will remember to remove the string after about 30 minutes. If the bleeding has not stopped when you remove the string, you may have to put it back on for a short period.

When the tail is cut off, apply a good disinfectant, such as lysol solution, iodine, or one of the many commercial "wound dressing" or "blood stopping" products available from livestock supply houses. If flies are a problem, also apply a fly repellent, such as one of the lindane products also available from livestock supply houses.

Fly strike may be a problem if the elastrator method is used dur-

ing fly season. Some operators cut off the tail after the band has been on for 2 or 3 days. A disinfectant and fly repellent may be applied at this time.

Figure 5 shows a properly docked lamb.



Figure 5.—A properly docked lamb. ST 2060-8

Castrating

Castration increases fattening but decreases the rate of gain and increases feed costs.

Wether, or castrated, lambs bring a higher price than ram lambs, but as market prices change to reflect the value of higher yields of lean meat now demanded by the consumer, the present discrimination against ram lambs may change.

In castrating, as in docking, more than one method may be used. You can remove the testicles with a knife, the elastrator and rubberband, or the emasculator or "Burdizzo."

Do the castrating on a bright, warm day. Provide clean, freshly bedded quarters, and keep the lamb quiet both before and after the operation.

Lambs 6 to 10 days old may be castrated with a knife as follows: Hold the lamb as shown in figure 6 and cut off the lower one-third of the scrotum, or bag, to expose the testicles. Grasp the testicles between the thumb and fingers and draw them out with the adhering cords. The cords will be severed by the pulling. Do the work quickly but not roughly, drawing out the testicles and cords with a steady



Figure 6.—Castrating with a knife.

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The trade name "Burdizzo" is commonly used in lieu of the word "emasculator" when speaking of the instrument. Use of the term here does not imply endorsement over similar equipment of another brand.

pull. Wash the wound with an anti-septic or a mild disinfectant. An ointment of sulfathiazole has also been used satisfactorily.

Lambs more than 3 weeks old may be castrated as above with this exception: Do not draw out the adhering cords. Scrape them off with a knife just back of the testicles. This will prevent excessive bleeding.

Lambs may be castrated with the elastrator and rubberband within the first day after birth. This method is widely used. Be sure that both testicles are below the rubberband before you release it from the elastrator (fig. 7).

It is common practice to castrate and dock lambs at the same time when the elastrator-rubberband method is used for both operations.

Use of the emasculator or "Burdizzo" is the preferred method of castrating mature lambs, but it is a slower and less dependable method for young lambs. The instrument is used to crush the spermatic cord—the cord leading to the testicles. The operation must be done



Figure 7.—Castrating with the elastrator and rubberband.

N 39368

very carefully or failure will result. Be sure that the cord and the arteries are within the jaws of the emasculator before you close the jaws.

Ear Tagging

All sheep intended for breeding should be permanently identified, or ear tagged. This is an absolute necessity if the sheep are purebred and you intend to register them with a breed association. Applications for registry will be refused unless each sheep carries an identification number.

Identification, or ear tagging, is also necessary to keep records of lamb and wool production.

You can buy metal ear tags with almost any combination of letters and numbers. The self-clinching type are easily inserted into the ears of young lambs with the special pliers shown in figure 8.

Most sheep breeders prefer to ear tag their lambs soon after birth—within 6 to 12 hours. This

permits immediate identification with the mother. Use of duplicate numbered tags, one in each ear, is recommended. Then, if one is lost, the lamb can still be identified. Blank metal tags and numbered stamps are available for replacing lost tags.

Plastic tags are available both with numbers and in different colors. The different colors may be used to identify sheep according to age, bloodline, feeding program, and so on.

Plastic tags with split ends and the self-clinching metal tags may be inserted through a hole in the lamb's ear made with the punch shown in figure 4. A hole is not necessary when using self-clinching metal tags with young lambs, but it does make it easier to tag older lambs.

Metal and plastic ear tags and the application equipment are available from livestock supply houses.

Temporary Identification

You may need to identify individual sheep for short periods of time, such as at lambing or breeding time.

Marking crayons or chalk (fig. 9) are very satisfactory for very temporary identification because the marks disappear within a few days. The crayons or chalk are available in a variety of colors.

Sheep may be temporarily identified for longer periods of time by branding them with a special branding fluid. Irons for paint branding are available in either letters or figures (fig. 10).



Figure 8.—Ear tagging with a metal tag.

N 39363



ST 2060-6
Figure 9.—Crayon, or chalk, marking for temporary identification.

When paint branding, dip the iron into the branding fluid, allow the excess fluid to drain off, and



ST 2059-3
Figure 10.—Branding iron and fluid.

then firmly apply the iron to the wool. Avoid twisting or moving the iron to prevent smearing the brand. Always use a branding fluid that can be scoured out at the wool processing plant. Never use ordinary paint.

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